

# How to choose the right diet





بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, The Most Gracious, The Most Merciful





Assalamu'alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuhu,

We pray that this message reaches you  
in good health and imaan.

On behalf of our AMAU Academy team, we would like  
to present to you these compiled notes that we have  
prepared to make your journey with us a lot easier.

Our notes are compiled by the AMAU Admin team  
and have not been comprehensively checked  
by a teacher.

If you find any errors or corrections that need  
to be made, kindly inform us via our email  
**helpdesk@amauacademy.com**

May Allah make our paths toward seeking  
beneficial knowledge easy and kindle our hearts  
with sincerity and gratefulness  
towards Him.

Jazakumullahu Khayran



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# Principles of Dieting

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*Chapter One*

In this course, misconceptions will be cleared around dieting and we will look at what the sunnah of the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم says about this matter. A diet isn't going to be recommended for you and this information doesn't replace advice given by a medical professional. Diets are personal and copying what is successful for others may not be the best option for you. You will be given general guidance, principles and ideas around dieting. You will then have to investigate what is most suitable for you.

We will also look at some simple methods of dieting, such as the advice of the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم , who said:

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ما ملأ آدمي وعاء شراً من بطن ، بحسب ابنِ آدَمَ أَكَلَاتُ يُقْمَنَ صُلْبُهُ،  
فإن كَانَ لَا مَحَالَةَ فَثُلُثٌ لِّطَعَامِهِ وَثُلُثٌ لِّشْرَابِهِ وَثُلُثٌ لِّنَفْسِهِ

**The human does not fill any container that is worse than his stomach. It is sufficient for the son of Adam to eat what will support his back. If this is not possible, then a third for food, a third for drink, and third for his breath.**

Narrated by at-Tirmidhi 2380. Classed as Saheeh by al-Albāni

Every single diet needs time to work. A person shouldn't be quick to judge whether their eating plan is working for them until they have had at least 4 - 8 weeks to try it. What really matters is long term changes that bring a person nearer to Allah, make us more grateful to Him and help us preserve the blessing of health that He has given us.

# Understanding Diets

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*Chapter Two*

We need to have a framework for understanding diets. There are more diets than a person can count. Some diets are not safe for people to try out. There are also diets which are safe but due to ignorance, people warn against them. Therefore, a person should be careful in selecting their diet and choose what they are comfortable with, after consulting with a medical professional.

All diets come back to three core principles and they can contain one or more of these principles.

### **Calorie restriction**

This could be calorie counting, having certain days when you eat less food. It can even be eating a third of your hunger. It can be fasting on certain days. Calorie restriction doesn't always work because a calorie of fat is not the same as a calorie of protein. A calorie of fibre is not the same as a calorie of sugar. Even if they produce the same energy result if you burn them in a tube, they don't produce the same result in your body.

### **Dietary restriction**

This is when you don't eat certain foods or certain types of foods. Such as cutting out carbohydrates, refined sugar or processed foods. It could be a vegan or keto diet. All of this returns to restricting the type of food you eat. However, there are also some keto diets that limit the number of calories you can take. This combines both calorie restriction and dietary restriction.

### **Time restriction**

This includes intermittent fasting, OMAD (one meal a day), prolonged water fasting and other diets which restrict food intake according to time. Intermittent fasting is when an individual eats whatever they want but they can only do so within a certain period of time. For example, they will not eat anything for 16 hours but in the remaining 8 hours they can eat whatever they want. However, even diets with time restriction can overlap and have calorie restriction or dietary restriction as well.

Some diets can include all the above three restrictions. To have an effective diet you must include at least two of the three restrictions.



# Calorie Counting

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*Chapter Three*

At a very basic level, calorie restriction involves counting the number of calories that you are consuming, along with calculating your BMR (Base metabolic rate). However, BMR is almost impossible to calculate accurately as it is an estimation of the number of calories your body burns just to keep you alive. A person aims to consume less calories than they are burning to lose weight. Calories burnt in exercise also have to be counted to have a more accurate estimate of the no. of calories burned in the day.

A person has to personalise calorie counting according to their goals. A person shouldn't restrict their calorie intake too much because it can lead their metabolism to slow down. A more moderate restriction would be to limit oneself to 80-85% of the calories they need. This way the body will be more comfortable with the change and a person can slowly lose weight over time.

But there are three major issues here:

- 1 The BMR is almost certainly inaccurate.**
- 2 The calories listed on foods are likely to be inaccurate as well.**
- 3 The effect of a calorie is different depending on its source (a calorie from fat isn't the same as a calorie from fibre, etc.)**

Therefore, basic calorie counting is ineffective unless it is combined with some kind of dietary restriction as well. For example, taking out highly processed foods, sugar and other kinds of foods that can cause weight gain.

One of the diets that fall under calorie restriction is the 5:2 diet. In this diet, a person eats a normal amount of food for five days and for the remaining two days, they restrict their calorie intake. Fasting every alternate day is also a kind of calorie restriction. There are different kinds of calorie restriction diets. What is important is ensuring that some level of dietary restriction is present as well.

There is also the issue of 'bouncing back' by yo-yo dieting, where a person goes on an extreme diet and then they eat a huge amount of food, and repeat this cycle of dieting and eating. The way one can avoid this is through consistency. This doesn't mean that a person can never eat the foods that they like. If they limit doing so to once a week, or when they are invited to someone's house or on the day of 'Eid then it shouldn't be an issue with the permission of Allah.

Another way to avoid 'bouncing back' is to maintain your weight healthily after a period of weight loss instead of trying to lose weight all the time. Losing weight rapidly can be dangerous and can be unsuccessful. A person must check with a medical professional if their dieting is safe.



# Dietary Restrictions

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*Chapter Four*

The most common kind of dietary restriction is macronutrient restriction. This is when you are restricting fat or carbohydrates. Examples of these kinds of diets are vegan, paleo and keto diets.

The first thing a person needs to look at is how much they need to restrict. Going to an extreme in dietary restrictions can have negative consequences. For certain diets, strict restriction is necessary such as keto diets which are done for treating epilepsy. For these diets, carbohydrate restriction is absolutely necessary. Keto diets - when done for losing weight - require carbohydrate restriction so that the body turns to burning fat for energy instead.

What a person needs to bear in mind as well is that not all carbohydrates are the same. Slow carbs like lentils and nuts burn slowly as opposed to carbs that spike your blood sugar like sugar, honey, potatoes, pasta and other such foods. A person doesn't have to strictly stick to a keto diet throughout the year. For some people simply restricting refined sugar and highly processed foods is enough for them to lose weight healthily.

There are many variations of the keto diet. One of them is the cyclical ketogenic diet. In this diet there are one and a half or two days in the week where you can have a lot of good carbs to fill up glycogen stores in the muscles. The rest of the week is for the standard keto diet.

Another kind of diet which involves dietary restriction is the paleo diet. In this diet, a person eats fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, eggs, lean meat, fish, along with healthy oils and fats but avoids anything which came from farming or was the result of industrial production like processed foods.

In the past, people were naturally restricted from having many foods that they liked to eat. They didn't have access to many of the foods that we can easily buy from the supermarket today. The concept of eating whatever you love everyday was not known to the companions. There were times when they didn't have any food, there were times when they only had dates and water and there were other times when they could eat what they loved.



# Time-Restricted Diets

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*Chapter Five*

A famous example of time-restricted diets is intermittent fasting. In this type of diet, there is a period of time in the day when a person doesn't eat. Many people do 16:8 intermittent fasting, where they don't eat for 16 hours and they eat in the remaining 8 hour window. Some start with 16:8 fasting and then increase the no. of hours fasted later on.

Time restricted diets have shown to be successful for many people. Even then, it is more effective for a person to combine time restricted diets with dietary restrictions and calorie counting. The time of day that you eat does affect the way your body processes food. For example, your body is much better at processing carbohydrates in the morning.

There is also the OMAD diet (One Meal A Day) where a person is limited to only a single meal in the entire day. The issue here is that to meet one's caloric needs in one meal they have to eat more than a third of their stomach.

The hadith mentions:

1

**It is sufficient for the son of Adam to eat what will support his back. If this is not possible, then a third for food, a third for drink, and third for his breath.**

Narrated by at-Tirmidhi 2380

So a Muslim who tries to do OMAD is going to require calorie restriction because it's not possible to eat 2000+ calories in one meal and not fill your stomach up. This is unless a person stretches their meal over 3 to 4 hours.

Another type of diet is water fasting, which is a prolonged period of time where a person only drinks water. It is important to note that one shouldn't try this diet until they have researched it very well, understood what to do and not to do, and consulted a medical professional first. This diet can be dangerous for some people especially for people who already have eating disorders or for people above a certain age.

Prolonged water fasting is usually defined as 3+ days of fasting. Ustadh Muhammad Tim Humble recommends 3 - 10 days for water fasting. Water fasting is the quickest way to lose weight. However, it's not only about the way to lose weight but also about the way that the body starts to repair the damage within it. Water fasting gives the entire digestive system a break and allows for a lot of cell repair. It is easier to adapt to water fasting from a keto diet rather than jumping into it straight away.

The biggest concern on a water fast is dehydration. A person may be perplexed at how dehydrated is a concern if a person is drinking water all day. The reason is because of electrolyte deficiency. Therefore, a person needs sodium, chloride, potassium and magnesium in their diet. Some also added phosphate to this list. A person can look up 'fasting electrolytes' for more information about the body's electrolyte needs.



What is also very important to bear in mind when water fasting is the refeed.

This is what you eat to finish the fast.

Three things should be avoided:

- 1 Avoid anything that spikes insulin. This is anything sugary or sweet. This includes foods like watermelon.**
- 2 Avoid having a high calorie intake. A person must start with a small amount of calories and then slowly increase it to what is normal.**
- 3 Avoid foods that negatively affect the composition of your gut bacteria. This includes foods that contain trans fats, high salt or are highly processed. This is what your body adjusts to and craves afterwards. Avoid dairy, nuts and high fructose fruits for a couple of days. A person should also take in an adequate amount of protein since a person is low on amino acids from fasting.**

Water fasting continuously is not healthy. You need time to build up minerals in the body. Ustadh Muhammad Tim's research suggests that water fasting longer than 10 days is not beneficial. There is a point of diminishing returns where the benefit derived is little compared to the effort put in.

# Dietary Tips and Tricks

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*Chapter Six*



The following are tips & tricks that can make any diet more effective.

The first is the concept of ‘The Minimum Effective Dose’. This is looking at the least that you need to do in order to make a change or get the desired result. Perhaps the minimum that a person needs to do is cut down on processed foods and sugar. If this alone produces the weight loss they desire, they don’t need further changes to lose weight in a healthy manner. With these limited changes, they might eventually reach a plateau which then requires further changes for further results.

This concept can be applied to the 3 different types of diets that were discussed previously. A person shouldn't unnecessarily make things hard upon themselves.

Allah says:

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يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ بِكُمْ الْيُسْرَ وَلَا يُرِيدُ بِكُمْ الْعُسْرَ

**Allāh intends for you ease and does not intend for you hardship**

Surah Al Baqarah 185

Exercise also has a role to play in your dieting. On its own, exercise is not an effective way to lose weight. A person can exercise and still overeat or eat unhealthy foods which make them gain weight. Or it could be that the no. of calories burnt in their exercise is small compared to the calories gained by eating. Similarly, diets alone can be ineffective. If one diets without exercise, one tends to slow down their metabolism or their body adjusts to the amount of food that you are giving it.

Cardio is very effective during any diet that puts you into ketosis. That is not the case for diets where you are eating plenty of carbohydrates. In such a diet, a person has to engage in high intensity intermittent training (HIIT) or they have to engage in resistance training (weight training). Slow cardio like walking is more effective in a keto based diet. One must return to a professional to determine what kind of training is more appropriate for their diet.

Walking 10,000 steps a day is low intensity cardio but can be done every single day just to keep one’s metabolism going, maintain their fitness levels and assist their dieting plan. If a person feels this takes up too much time, they can listen to a lecture, read Qur’an, do dhikr or engage in any other beneficial act while walking. It is something that can be done consistently - unlike many other kinds of exercises - which helps greatly in dieting.

A person can also alternate between rapid and slow weight loss. Consistent rapid weight is not only difficult but can have detrimental effects on one’s health and can lead to one ‘bouncing back’. Your body can adapt to whatever dietary changes you are making if you do it for too long and can therefore make them less effective in the long run. Even something as simple as a cheat meal can break the consistency of rapid weight loss.

One should also try to get a sufficient amount of protein in the morning. Protein makes a person feel full, helps cut down cravings and stops their blood sugar from spiking. This doesn't mean that a person has to eat meat in the morning which many would find uncomfortable. There are different sources of protein that a person can consume to meet their protein needs with comfort.

The order in which people eat their food can make a difference as well. Let's say that a person drinks a sweet cup of tea that is high in sugar and then eats a plate of vegetables and a piece of chicken. The order in which a person eats these foods will determine what happens to their blood. Starting with the protein, then the vegetables and then the sweet tea is different from drinking the sweet tea on an empty stomach.

It is also important to remain hydrated regardless of which diet you choose. If a person doesn't like drinking water then setting a specific amount of water that should be drunk in the day can be necessary. This helps them to stay consistent in meeting their hydration needs. Some people can lose weight just by improving their hydration.

Some bodybuilders are very picky on when they consume their carbs. Some have their carbs while exercising but not in their post workout shake. The idea is that exercise before taking in carbs may be related to sending more glucose to the muscle as glycogen and stop the carbs from turning into fat. Therefore, if one was to have their cheat meal, even a light exercise before having it can reduce fat storage.

The 80/20 principle suggests that 20% of the effort produces 80% of the results. For example, if one were to water fast for 40 days, 80% of the benefits produced would be obtained in 7-10 days. Is it worth it for a person to then fast 30 more days with the much reduced benefit that remains? Many would say that it isn't.

The Prophet ﷺ said:

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اٰخِرُضْ عَلٰى مَا يَنْفَعُكَ وَاسْتَعِزْ بِاللّٰهِ وَلَا تَعْجِزْ

**Be keen on what benefits you and seek help from Allah, and do not give up.**

Sahih Muslim 2664

# Diet Extras



*Chapter Seven*



There are topics that still require some research in the field of dieting.

One such topic is genetics and personalization. There isn't enough research yet for someone to do a test to determine what is the best diet for them. A person can look at their own personal situation, what works for them, what they enjoy, what gets them results and make the appropriate changes necessary. A person shouldn't have an obsession with one particular method of dieting. If they see that after 12 weeks of dieting not much has changed, they should look at a different option for weight loss. Dieting is very personal, so what works for one person might not work for another.

Another topic that is deserving of more research is cold and heat exposure. It could be the case that exposure to cold water could potentially cause some of the stubborn fat which is hard to get rid off to convert into a type of fat which is the brown fat which is easier to get rid off and is burnt to keep your body warm. There is also research taking place on whether heat exposure, such as getting into a hot sauna, has effects on body composition and on other aspects of one's health.

Some people resort to using drugs and supplements to lose weight. Supplements can be helpful when a person has deficiencies due to their diet. However, there are issues that need to be addressed.

One is that many supplements are unverified as they are not held to the same verification standards as medicine. Some of these supplements are tested on mice and not on people. Sometimes the supplements are not absorbed well into the body. Therefore, the benefit derived is very little compared to what was expected. Vitamin levels are hard to test accurately as there are many factors that affect them. There is also the issue of some tablets containing pork or a filling agent that can cause health issues. A person should be careful to research carefully and investigate the filler and other present ingredients in the supplements.

A person should resort to supplements if their doctor advises them to, if they have a particular condition and if a diet that they follow has a known deficiency in it. For example, if one follows a diet that results in low electrolyte levels they can use supplements to replenish them.

Some people supplement with growth hormones and steroids. With the right diet and exercise, you can get a lot of the benefits without injecting yourself with anything. There are diets and exercise routines that maximise growth hormone and testosterone. You won't have the same results as one who uses growth hormones and steroids but it is much healthier and safer for a person.



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